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# The Garbage Pail, a National Thrift Barometer

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THE city dump is no respecter of persons. It reveals the inefficiencies of our industrial and communal organizations. It serves as a measure of the efficacy of our thrift movements. Thrift was the war-time slogan; the government bent every energy to induce us to save. The influence of this campaign was registered in the city dump. A study of the municipal reports covering the years 1917-18 will show a remarkable decline in the amount of waste handled by the city agencies but these same reports reveal the lack of permanent influence of this campaign. The amount of garbage handled in our larger centers in November, 1918, increased from 10 to 25 per cent over the amount of material handled in the previous month. It was not necessary to consult the news dispatches to ascertain that hostilities had ceased,—the garbage pail revealed that fact.

Here is a measure of the effectiveness of our movements for organized thrift. We may theorize about savings, we may develop programs for increasing individual and social thrift but it is to the city dump that we must look to secure the data by which our program can be made effective.

## GARBAGE RECLAMATION IN THE ARMY

One is tempted to say that garbage won the war. Not because it contains matter essential to the manufacture of munitions, not because it is the chief supply of glycerin upon which the success of any military program de-

pends, but because it checked food waste in the Army and became a safeguard of the efficiency and morale of our men.

It is true that few Army officers recognized that fact; it is doubtful if many would agree even in the face of the evidence because the average official of the War Department like the average citizen looks upon garbage as a nuisance, as a loathsome thing which must be put out of sight and mind once and for all time.

Garbage in the early days of the war was more than a nuisance to the War Department; it was a bug-bear. Every system of disposal was open to severe criticism. Incineration was destructive of valuable by-products and fuel. The method of sale to contractors in bulk was inefficient. The government did not receive an adequate return for the waste, and valuable material with glycerin content was being disposed of for stock feeding purposes.

It remained for an officer of the British Army, assigned to our government to assist in our reclamation work, to develop the true function of garbage. Col. Sir Frank B. Beauchamp adapted the British system to our needs and through the initiative and foresight of Col. John S. Fair, Assistant to the Acting Quartermaster General, saw it put into successful operation in this country. Under this plan each unit of the Army conducting a mess was compelled to keep a six-fold classification of its table waste.

This material as segregated was collected daily by the salvage corps, weighed and the proper records covering the weight of each class was checked against the separate units.

The daily tally sheet was the index to the kitchen efficiency of the various units of the division. It became a danger signal in many instances because a high percentage of waste meant one of two things, over-feeding or poorly prepared food. Efficiency and morale were affected by either situation; valuable food was being consumed to no purpose. The salvage officer by consulting this tally chart was enabled to locate the danger points at once. A hurried but heated interview with the mess sergeant and a rapid transfer of kitchen personnel to the School for Bakers and Cooks was the usual means of dealing with the situation. Garbage became the terror of the inefficient,—the camp inspector worked unceasingly and untiringly.

This system increased the revenue derived from the sale of the waste material; it checked the loss of valuable by-products but its true value lay in the fact that it revealed the points of inefficiency. It indicated those centers where additional education and training were needed.

#### GARBAGE AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFICIENCY

Society needs some such measure to check the efficiency of its social institutions. It must utilize its garbage pail, its city dump and its institutions to determine if it has in reality adopted thrift, if it is utilizing its material and man power effectively. The success of this system in the Army lies in the fact that the men were under social control. There is a portion of our people equaling in number the forces

called to the colors who are under the same system of control. Our institutional population is maintained under a somewhat similar system of centralized authority. Is it not time to look at our institutional garbage pails in order to check the efficiency of our institutional kitchens?

Our government put a similar system of check into operation at a federal institution. The War Prison Labor and National Waste Reclamation Section of the War Industries Board issued an outline of this system and had it adopted at a naval prison. Other institutions under the control of the federal government were to adopt this plan when the armistice suspended the operation of the War Industries Board. As a result of this suspension of activity the other federal institutions are pursuing the old policy of dealing with garbage as a nuisance and our state institutions are following a similar policy. H. C. Wright, in his *Fiscal Control of State Institutions*, reports but three as having such a system of checking the efficiency of the kitchen. It is time for our institutions to benefit by the experience of the War Department and through State Board of Charities or similar bodies to establish some such system of measurement, some method of utilizing their garbage as a measure of the efficiency of the management of the institution.

#### THE CITY DUMP

Our attitude is the same in regard to the other waste material we discard. We erect unsightly dumps as a monument to our inefficiency. We compile little or no data relative to the type or amount of material discarded by the community. We talk thrift while we bury in the dump arti-

cles with the potential value of millions. The war temporarily checked this tendency. The amount of secondary metals reclaimed in 1916 was more than 130 per cent of the amount returned to industry in the previous year. The amount of the heavy metals conserved and re-utilized increased about 75 per cent in the same period. Bear in mind the condition of the garbage pail following armistice day and you can readily depict the condition in regard to the city dump. We are again swinging back to pre-war conditions at our points for handling the waste of the community; we are again diverting needed labor to the extractive industries while we build ore dumps at the doors of our city.

#### THE WHITMAN PLAN

Our city dumps and our correctional institutions are the products of the type of thinking which attempts to solve a problem by ignoring it. We waste men and material because it requires time and effort to find the necessary solution. We lose our unsalvaged material, we waste our unadjusted man.

The Chicago House of Correction is an exception to this rule. John L. Whitman, sometime superintendent of that institution, inaugurated a system of employing the physically unfit man in handling the waste of the community which not only revealed the potential wealth which exists in the dump and in the waste man but also served as a basis of the government's war-time program for waste reclamation.

Under Whitman's plan of utilizing prison labor in handling the waste of the municipal departments, the inmates thus employed were enabled to make a return equal to four times their

cost of maintenance and were enabled to contribute a sum equal to 50 per cent of the cost of maintaining the institution. The material after being properly handled was sold for a sum 900 per cent more than was received for a similar amount when it was sold unsorted. Pieces of copper wire which had been thrown aside by the electrical department netted more than \$43,000, waste paper made a return of over \$4,000 while old rags saved from the garbage made a return of approximately \$4,000 and the platinum in the worn out electric light bulbs was found to be worth \$9,000. These figures, representative of the returns secured for various items of waste, are compiled from the financial statement for the year 1916,—a representative pre-war year in the waste trade.

#### ORGANIZED THRIFT IN THE ARMY

Whitman's system proved to be the solution of the two pressing problems which were facing the War Department in 1917. An establishment functioning with a machinery untested by war was proving unfit for the task. Waste was rampant. Such a situation was to be expected. A small staff working under archaic methods of handling material and with theories ill-adapted to the times was not only wasteful of material, it was also wasteful of man power. The rigid personnel system could not attempt to adjust the man who did not readily fit into the military machinery. He was either discharged as an "inept" or handled as a military misdemeanant. Either system meant the possible increase of institutional population, either civil or military and any addition to that class which is maintained in idleness meant a serious drain on the resources of this country.

This problem was referred to Mr. Hugh Frayne, General Organizer of the American Federation of Labor, who represented labor on the War Industries Board. Mr. Frayne was assisted by Mr. John J. Manning, also a member of the Federation and a deep student of the problems of prison employment, and also by the present writer. A plan was developed and submitted to the Board by Mr. Frayne. Whitman's plan was the basis of this program which called for the establishment of a central bureau in the War Department which was to have sole jurisdiction over worn material, this material to be repaired for re-issue or prepared for the market by labor companies which were to be composed of men unfitted for military service or by general prisoners and prisoners of war.

This plan was approved by the War Industries Board and forwarded to the War Department for consideration. The plan was put into effect in the early part of 1918 but with one serious defect,—no provisions were made concerning labor and as a result the Conservation Division could not function either as a reclaimer of material or of men.

This defect was soon remedied. The Conservation Division was placed under the direct supervision of Col. John S. Fair who was largely responsible for the effective development of this feature of army administration, as well as the proper development of the remount and fuel and forage branches of the Quartermaster Corps. Col. Fair drafted and secured the passage of special regulations covering the reclamation activity of the Army and in these regulations he adopted the program of the War Prison Labor and National Waste Reclamation Section

of the War Industries Board. He provided for salvage companies which were to be composed of men unfit for line duty. These companies comprised those men who theretofore had been discharged as "inept" or who had fallen afoul of the military courts and had become military misdemeanants. Col. Fair also arranged for the utilization of prisoners of war, conscientious objectors and general prisoners in certain features of the salvage work. Thus, at one stroke was launched the greatest movement for organized thrift in the history of our army, a movement which decreased criminality, abolished idleness as a punishment for military offenses and made a monetary saving estimated at \$65,000,000.

#### UTILIZATION OF THE UNADJUSTED MAN

Broad powers were granted the Salvage Corps in the development of its work. It was authorized to develop agricultural, mineral and forest lands owned, purchased, or leased for the army. Under this provision Col. Fair in coöperation with the group of the War Industries Board responsible for the inception of this program developed a plan looking to the utilization of the socially unfit from the military standpoint. This plan would, doubtless, have blazed a new trail in the field of penology and would have assisted materially in developing a national waste conservation movement so essential to any scheme for organized thrift, but the armistice was signed before the program in its entirety could be put into effect.

The movement for the establishment of the camp gardens is a part of this program. Here again the basis of the program was the desire to utilize

the waste man. The opportunity to secure added food supplies from regions adjacent to the camp and the cultivation of idle lands were factors which received consideration but the primary reason was a desire to open additional avenues of useful employment to the unadjusted man under the control of the military group. Those of us who were instrumental in developing this program and putting it into effect did not consider the financial return, large though it was, as an index of the real function and success of this service. The number of men returned to the line, the amount of Liberty Bonds purchased by prisoners of war employed at a small wage on these camp farms served as our measure of the effectiveness of these newer ideas of thrift.

The War Prison Labor and National Waste Reclamation Section was instrumental in developing other systems of waste conservation which included the use of the unadjusted group. It is to this Board that the securing of the executive order permitting the use of state prisoners on federal work is to be attributed. Under this authority a large shoe repair shop operated under the supervision of the Salvage Corps was installed in the New Jersey State Prison at Trenton, N. J. Here with unskilled and untrained men the army developed its largest quasi-governmental shop which prepared for re-issue a thousand pairs of worn shoes daily.

This same section was responsible for the movement for the establishment of the Whitman plan in other centers and a number of communities organized their salvage work along the lines developed by this group. Unfortunately, the work of this sec-

tion ceased with the disbanding of the War Industries Board and, although the Department of Commerce assumed charge of the function, the movement was but short lived. Congress was busily at work saving pennies and losing dollars and refused the necessary funds for the continuation of the movement which would certainly have assisted materially in the development of a national system of thrift. Despite the fact that this section had but a short time to develop its program an examination of its records will show that in at least three cases prisoners were utilized to marked advantage in handling the waste of the community.

#### DISPOSAL OF ARMY SUPPLIES AFTER ARMISTICE

This section of the War Industries Board made one final contribution on the eve of its disbanding which has had far-reaching effect. The signing of the armistice found the Salvage Corps with hundreds of thousands of articles on hand waiting repair. The army had no further need for renovated material. Under such conditions this material would be sold and utilized in the manufacture of other articles. The members of this section of the War Industries Board pointed out that the wearing value of these articles should be conserved in their present form and proposed that the army sell this material to the states to be repaired by the inmates of the state institutions and utilized in maintenance work. The army accepted this plan and the machinery of administration was set up but in the legal tangles which ensued the opportunity for the development of this idea was lost. However, as a result, of the movement to put it into effect a ruling was secured which permitted the sale

of material to states and municipalities and upon that ruling the army developed its system of chain stores for disposal of army supplies.

#### MUNICIPAL WASTE PROBLEMS

There is a growing interest in the city dump. The experience of our government will, doubtless, have a marked effect in the future development of our municipal and industrial functions. We must realize how archaic and wasteful our methods are and what a social cost is entailed by their retention. Two groups have recently become interested in the question of the disposal of the city waste. Both groups attribute inefficiency and cost to the same factor; the same conclusion was reached in widely different fields of research and interest. Our present system of communal waste collection has developed a character who is the logical development of our present lack of policy in dealing with the waste of the community. The collector or junk man is looked upon as a social liability by the social worker and the city engineer.

#### *The Junk Man*

The cost of collecting the rubbish of the city is increased by the junk man. This fact is revealed by the recent research in this field. The city collection is slowed up by the fact that the city collector picks the valuable waste out of the litter. This means not only a loss of revenue but a greater loss in retardation of the collective service. Scavengers who pick the rubbish cans prior to the rounds of the collector increase the cost of collection by scattering the material. The city engineer has seen the problem but has not as yet offered a solution.

#### *Juvenile Delinquency*

The social worker has also indicted the junk man. He is charged with being the chief contributory factor in male juvenile delinquency. A superintendent of a correctional institution for juveniles, basing his contention on the record of three hundred commitments, claims that the junk business is primarily responsible for 90 per cent of the delinquencies. The Chicago Juvenile Protective Association made a thorough investigation of this question and reached the same conclusion. They found, in Chicago, where the system of utilizing prisoners in waste reclamation was first inaugurated, that the itinerant junk man was the chief cause for commitment to institutions for juvenile delinquents and often responsible for the first step in criminality which ended in the Chicago House of Correction, the center of the new system for dealing with city waste. This group proposed breaking this vicious circle by municipalization of the junk business and elimination by ordinance of the junk collector. It was argued that this would give added revenue to the city and eliminate a large amount of juvenile delinquency.

#### *Waste by the Housewife*

Again, the data covering the flow of material to the city dump can be used to show wherein this movement for municipalization would have little or no influence as an educational movement. As the conditions now stand the junk collector performs an economic service. He secures as large an amount of waste material as possible. To municipalize might mean a decrease in the amount conserved. A study of the waste handled by the

City of Rochester shows that the housewife is the real contributing factor in our present system of waste by the community. Due to her failure to make the proper segregation valuable waste commodities are being lost in the ash dump. It was estimated that with proper segregation, the amount of the waste material conserved at the city dump would be increased at least 30 per cent. Municipalization would not check this loss of valuable waste in the ash dump.

Sentiment, not law, will be the only effective measure for checking this present system of inefficiency. Patriotism became the driving force for conservation during the war. How effective this force was in comparison with the previous means for stimulating conservation in pre-war days can best be measured by a reference to the increasing material handled during the war and the decline in the amount of material sent to the city dumps. We need a similar force in the days of peace if we are to increase the amount of waste material which will be conserved and sent back into the channels of consumption. The answer to this problem, doubtless, lies in a system of coöperative waste saving such as that which was launched by the government and put into operation in Akron, Ohio.

#### COÖPERATIVE WASTE SAVING

The program for an incorporated community waste saving scheme was fostered by the War Prison Labor and National Waste Reclamation Section and was put into successful operation by George W. Sherman, Salvage Manager of the B. F. Goodrich Co., Akron, Ohio.

This system will not only check waste in the home, it will assist con-

servation in industry. By this system a factory or store with small volume of waste can have it handled at the same cost per pound and will receive the same revenue per pound as an industry with a large turn-over. By this system it would be possible to check the distribution of material, which, heretofore, has been impossible due to the excessive cost of handling small accumulations of waste material, and will inculcate ideas of thrift by demonstrating the added value which accrues with increased accumulation and proper assorting of the waste material.

Space does not permit a discussion of the details of this system. The Department of Commerce has investigated this movement and reported upon its successful operation in a publication known as the *Akron Industrial Salvage Company,—A Community Incorporated Waste Saving Experiment*. In it will be found interesting data covering the cost of operation, the financial return and the future developments of the work.

But one feature should be mentioned here. That is the system of collecting the waste paper from the public schools and applying the net proceeds for playground work; and the collection of the waste of the home for furthering the welfare work of the community. In this program, doubtless, lies the answer to the problem of finding a new force to intensify savings, a new community driving power similar to patriotism to force the individual to save material for the benefit of others.

The Board of Managers of the Chicago House of Correction, in the annual report for the year 1918, discussed the salvage work of the institution and stated that the present returns could not be continued indefinitely due to the

fact that in the early stages of the movement the institution uncovered the accumulation of years in the various city departments, that they could not hope to secure the same amount each year due to the fact that the separate departments were certain to sell the material direct to the dealer.

In this naïve statement is revealed the administrative attitude towards waste material and the proper development of the functions and machinery for securing an adequate return from its disposal. Experience had given them a measure which would have enabled them to force through a program for centralized control over the waste of the city, a system which has been successfully adopted by the army salvage movement.

This attitude of mind on the part of the officials shows the weakness of municipalization and the strength of the Akron plan. A cooperative company working on the lines of a commercial concern will be enabled to secure such convincing data as to the waste of the municipal de-

partments and the homes that it will be enabled not only to increase the revenue from the waste but also to decrease the amount of waste in the community.

Thrift is paramount but habits of thrift cannot be inculcated by precept. Modern society has left little for the initiative of the individual. Group action is the basis of our modern communal life. Our thrift movements, heretofore, have depended upon individual initiative. In order to have our thrift movement conform with modern social conditions it is necessary to organize for communal action. We must throw the emphasis on spending rather than on saving and develop methods of measuring the effectiveness of our system of expenditures so that we can secure the maximum return for the dollar spent by the community. We must develop some system of measurement similar to the system utilized by the army to force efficiency upon the group. We need to utilize our garbage pails as barometers of the national thrift movement.